



SOUTH FLORIDA

## Prominent Miami-Dade lobbyist 'Dusty' Melton pleads guilty to tax evasion, faces prison

By Jay Weaver

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Miami lobbyist 'Dusty' Melton pleaded guilty on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025, to tax evasion. He will be sentenced in May. Feds have charged him with owing \$1.3 million in back income taxes.



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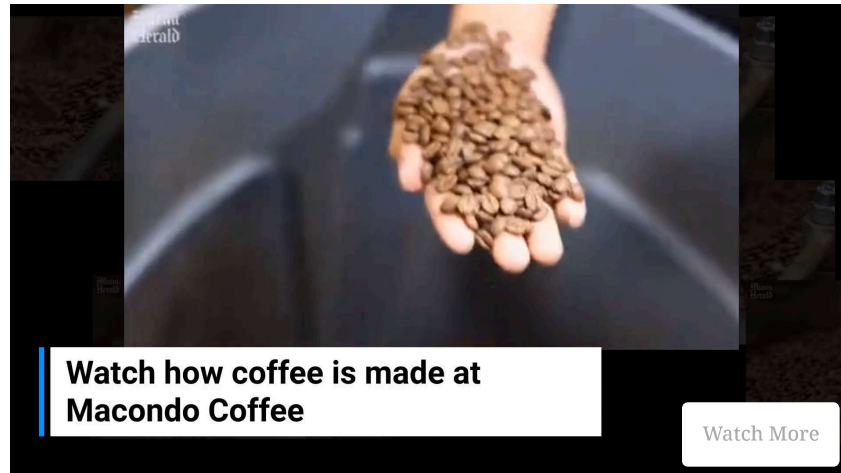
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Prominent Miami-Dade County lobbyist Eston "Dusty" Melton III pleaded guilty on Wednesday to tax evasion stemming from his failure to pay income taxes over a

decade, which will likely lead to a prison sentence in May.

Melton failed to pay about \$1.3 million in taxes from 2005 to 2014, and those debts with penalties and interest grew to about \$1.7 million by 2019, according to a federal prosecutor. The lobbyist, who has represented blue-chip clients in Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties for more than 40 years, dodged the Internal Revenue Service's efforts to collect his taxes, prosecutor Marc Osborne said in a plea agreement.

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Melton, 70, who pleaded guilty in West Palm Beach federal court, told the Miami Herald that he paid back more than half of his original tax debts since selling his Coconut Grove home in April 2018. He said he still owes the IRS about \$626,000 in taxes from his income over a decade as the owner of a lobbying firm, Global Projects, Inc.

Under the plea agreement, Melton faces between two and three years in prison depending on whether U.S. District Judge Robin L. Rosenberg determines the lobbyist used “sophisticated means” in evading payment of his taxes. Melton and his defense lawyer, Michael J. Rosen, say he didn’t, which would result in the shorter sentence, but Osborne counters that he did, which would lead to the longer prison term.

During a mid-January interview with the Miami Herald, Melton took full responsibility for his misconduct, recounting how he chose to pay family debts

“Looking back, there is no excuse for failing to take my tax obligation as seriously as I should have,” Melton told the Herald. “It is not in my nature to cheat the federal

government, to cheat anyone, and I am absolutely mortified that I did so.”

Melton, who graduated from the University of Virginia before joining the Miami Herald as a government reporter in the 1970s, detoured into the lobbying profession in 1982 when he was hired by mega-county lobbyist Steve Ross, whose political connections were legend. When Ross died 13 years later, Melton acquired his late partner’s lucrative lobbying business. The clients continued to roll in, and so did the income.

### **Didn’t pay taxes for 10 years**

But starting in 2005, Melton admitted that he stopped paying his taxes for a full decade — despite filing complete annual returns to the IRS.

“The simple reason that I did not pay all my taxes in those years is because I put my family obligations first, as a father and a husband ... and that left virtually nothing to pay my income taxes,” said Melton, who moved with his wife, Mabelys, from Miami to West Palm Beach. “That was the choice I made, and it was the wrong choice.”

He said that among about \$2.5 million in personal expenses were: alimony payments to his ex-wife, child support for his three children from that marriage, college tuition for those children and an adopted son, and legal fees for defending the adopted son, Mario Melton, who was sentenced to 2-1/2 years in prison after being convicted in a 2016 Miami federal trial of importing the club drug “Molly” from China.

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As he paid off his family debts, Melton said he feared he was going to lose his home at 3430 Poinciana Ave. in Coconut Grove. IRS tax liens piled up. He had only paid off \$62,100 of his tax bill, according to court records.

To avoid losing his home, Melton filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2017. Under Chapter 11, creditors, including the IRS, cannot take your primary residence to satisfy debts.

In 2018, he sold the home for \$1.358 million, according to county records. Most of that money was spent on his family debts, but Melton also said he made a payment of \$553,093 toward his tax obligation to the IRS.

Melton said that since 2014, he has made annual tax payments based on 30% of his income through 2023 — but about half of his old tax debts remained unpaid.

Both Melton and his wife, who once worked as a secretary at Miami-Dade County Hall, are registered as lobbyists with the county. Together, records show, their clients include AvMed, the University of Miami, Covanta Dade Renewable Energy, Inc., Goodwill Industries of South Florida, Inc., Restore Miami Marine Stadium, Inc. and Super Yellow Cab.

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